

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l
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Chapter XVII: Yitro (Ex. 18:1–20:23)

Essay 15. Creation and Sinai

שַׁבָּת פָּרָק ט' "אֶרֶץ יִרְאַה וְשָׁקְטָה". אִם יִרְאַה לְמָה שָׁקְטָה? וְאִם שָׁקְטָה לְמָה יִרְאַה? אֲלֵא בַתְּחִלָּה יִרְאַה וְלִבְסוּף שָׁקְטָה וְכֹו' עַב"ל.

Tractate **Shabbat, chapter 9**, speaks of the acceptance of the Torah at Sinai:

Chizkiya said: What is [the meaning of that] which is written: “From Heaven, You caused judgment to be heard; **the Earth was afraid and unconcerned**; as G-d rose to execute judgment, to deliver all the humble of the Earth. Selah”¹? **If [the Earth] was afraid, why was it unconcerned? And if it was unconcerned, why was it afraid? Rather**, [the meaning is]: **In the beginning, it was afraid, and in the end, it was unconcerned.**” And why was [the Earth] afraid? [It is] in accordance with Reish Lakish, as Reish Lakish said: What is [the meaning of that] which is written: “And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day”²? Why do I require the superfluous [letter] *heh*, [the definite article, which does not appear on any of the other days]? It teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, established a condition with the act of Creation, and said to them: If Israel accepts the Torah [on the sixth day of Sivan], you will exist; and if not, I will return you to [the primordial state of] chaos and disorder.

- Shabbat 88a

הַעוֹלָם מִתְחַבְּטִים לְהַבִּין הַכֶּפֶל שֶׁל לְשׁוֹן זֶה. וְעוֹד יֵשׁ לְהַקְשׁוֹת אֵף לְפִי תִירוּץ רַז"ל תִּנְאֵי הַתְּנָה עִם מַעֲשֵׂה בְרֵאשִׁית וְכֹו', אִיךָ יִתְקַשֵּׁר הָעֲנָן שֶׁל הַכְּתוּב שֶׁנִּרְאָה שֶׁהִירְאָה בָּאָה לָהּ כְּשֶׁהִשְׁמִיעַ הַתּוֹרָה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם דְּוָקָא, וְהֵלֵא מִשְׁעָה רֵאשׁוֹנָה שֶׁל הַתְּנָאֵי שְׂיִכָּא יִרְאַה זֶה. וְעוֹד שֶׁהִיָּה לֹו לֹוּמֵר מִשְׁמַיִם הַשְּׁמַעְתָּ דָּת וְיִמְהוּ דִּין. וְעוֹד מֵה שְׁסִיִּים "בְּקוּם-לְמִשְׁפָּט" וְכֹו', וְיִמָּה עֲנָן זֶה לְזֶה. וְעוֹד קָשָׁה הַלְשׁוֹן שֶׁל הַתִּירוּץ, מִתְחִלָּה יִרְאַה וְלִבְסוּף שָׁקְטָה, דְּמַהוּ בַתְּחִלָּה וְבִסוּף, פְּשִׁיטָא שֶׁהִירְאָה קְדָמָה לְשָׁקְטָה.

Question 1: **Everyone has wrestled to understand the repetitive language** of the Gemara, “If [the Earth] was afraid, why was it unconcerned? And if it was unconcerned, why was it afraid?”

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¹ Ps. 76:9–10. The Torah is discussing the destruction of the army of the Assyrian king Sennacherib, but the Talmud is interpreting the verses as pertaining to the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

² Gen. 1:31.

Question 2: **Also, we can question the explanation of the rabbis of blessed memory that this was a condition “that G-d established with the act of Creation: If Israel accepts the Torah, you [i.e., the Earth] will exist; and if not, I will return you to [the primordial state of] chaos and disorder.” How is this explanation of the rabbis, related to Israel’s acceptance of Torah, connected to the matter of Scripture, “From Heaven, you caused judgment to be heard”? It appears from the Scriptural text that the fear came to [the Earth] specifically when the Torah was heard from the Heavens, for wasn’t the fear relevant from the first hour of the stipulation, i.e., at the time of Creation?**

Question 3: **Also, according to the rabbis, who said the verse is discussing the acceptance of Torah, then it should have said, “From Heaven, You caused ‘law’ to be heard.” What is the meaning of this “judgment” that it instead says?**

Question 4: **Also, verse 10 makes sense if we understand verse 9 to be discussing judgment, but if verse 9 is instead discussing Torah, then what is this conclusion, “as G-d rose to execute judgment, to deliver all the humble of the Earth”? What is the connection between this verse discussing judgment and that previous verse discussing the Torah?**

Question 5: **Another difficulty is the language of the solution, “In the beginning, it was afraid, and in the end, it was unconcerned,” for what is this “in the beginning” and “in the end,” for it’s obvious that fear preceded being unconcerned.**

אלא ודאי צריך לומר שבשביל שתי דברים הארץ יראת מתחלה, ואף לאחר ששקטה מאחת נשארה עדיין היראה השנית, ומשום הכי דרשו הפל אמ יראה למה שקטה, ואם שקטה וכו'. וזהו שרמזו ו"ל פשאמרו בתחלה יראה, ושייך לשון בתחלה מפני שהם שתי דברים. ואף לאחר ששקטה מאחת לא שקטה לגמרי עד לבסוף, והיינו דבנדאי היראה הראשונה היתה בעת שהתנה התנאי וכו' כמו שאמרו ו"ל, ועוד יראה פעם שנית, שנודע שמתחלה ברא העולם במדת הדיון, יראה שאינו מתקיים, שיתף עמו מדת הרחמים.

Rather, the answer to questions 1 and 5 is that it’s certainly necessary to say that the Earth was afraid because of two matters. The Earth was afraid first because of one matter, and even after it became unconcerned because of the resolution of the first matter, the fear of the second matter remained. Because of this, [the rabbis] expounded with the repetitive language: “If [the Earth] was afraid, why was it unconcerned? And if it was unconcerned, why was it afraid?” This is what [the rabbis] hinted at when they said, “In the beginning, it was afraid,” and the language “in the beginning” is appropriate because there were two matters causing the fear. Even after [the Earth] became unconcerned from the first matter, it wasn’t completely unconcerned until later, after the second matter was also resolved.

The answer to question 2 is that [the Earth’s] first fear was certainly at the time of the making of the stipulation, i.e., at Creation, that the Earth would only continue to exist if Israel accepted the Torah, as [the rabbis] of blessed memory said.

[The Earth] was also afraid a second time, for it's known that initially, [G-d] created the world to be ruled by the attribute of strict justice. But He saw that it could not exist under those conditions. Thus, He partnered [the attribute of strict justice] with the attribute of mercy. This is the answer to question 3: The verse says "judgment" instead of "law" because the Earth was not only concerned with whether Israel would accept the Law, but it was also concerned about G-d's initial plan to rule via the attribute of strict justice.

וימה שלא הנה מתקיים, היינו הארץ שלא היתה יכולה לעמוד, אבל השמים שאין בהם חטא היו מתקיימים אף בדין, ולכן לקיים הארץ הוצרך לשמח החסד עם הדין. אבל עם כל זה יש לה עדיין מקום לדאוג, שהרי עם הצדיקים הקב"ה מתנהג עמם בדין, כמו שאמרו חז"ל לאלו תלמידי חכמים, ששגגות נעשות להם פגמים, ועוד מדקדק עם חסידיו פחות השערה, ושמה אינם יכולים לעמוד. ועם הרשעים מתנהג עמם בחסד, אבל זה החסד הוא דין גמור כדכתיב "ומשלם לשונאיו אל-פניו להאבידו", ועוד שבראות עצמם מצליחים בדרך הרעה אינם משימים את לבם לעשות תשובה ומשחיתים העולם.

Under the attribute of strict justice, what would not exist would be the Earth, which could not stand, but the Heavens—within which there is no sin—was standing even with such strict justice. Therefore, the existence of the Earth required a partnership of kindness with strict justice.

But with all this, [the Earth] still had reason to worry, because with the righteous, the Holy One, Blessed be He, deals with them according to justice. This is as [the rabbis] of blessed memory said: "[In the phrase] 'declare to My people their transgression'—these [people] are the Torah scholars, whose unwitting [transgressions] become for them tantamount to intentional [transgressions]."³ It is also said, "He is precise with them up to a hairsbreadth [so that even slight deviations can elicit severe punishment]."⁴ It is also said, "Perhaps they would be unable to stand."⁵ Even with the wicked, He deals with them with kindness, but this kindness has within it absolute strict justice, as it is written, "but those who hate Him, He repays to their faces with destruction."⁶ Furthermore, even the kindness shown to the wicked doesn't help them, for when they see themselves succeed on a bad path, they do not impose upon their hearts to repent, and they corrupt the world.

³ Bava Metzia 33b.

⁴ Yerushalmi Shekalim 5:1; Yevamot 121b; Bava Kamma 50a.

⁵ See, e.g., Yalkut Shimoni on Prophets 115:1, "It was taught [in a Baraita]: Rabbi Eliezer the Great says that if the Holy One, Blessed be He, came in judgment with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, they would be unable to stand before the rebuke, as it is said, 'Come, stand before the L-rd while I cite against you all the kindnesses that the L-rd has done to you and your fathers.' "

⁶ Deut. 7:10.

משום הכי אמר הפסוק "משמים השמעת דין", דהיינו כשבראת העולם במדת הדין, השמים היו מקבלים עליהם, וכשראתה הארץ שהשמים קבלו עליהם מדה זו, "ארץ יראה", ואחר כך כששיתף עמו מדת הרחמים "ושקטה". אבל לא שקטה לגמרי, שעדיין היה לה לדאוג "בקום למשפט אלהים", בין עם הצדיקים ובין עם הרשעים כנ"ל. וכשראתה "להושיע כל-עגרי-ארץ סלה" דהיינו שלהענוים מתנהג עמהם בחסד גמור, כדאמרינן בפרק קמא דראש השנה למי נושא עון למי שעובר על פשע, אם כן באלו הענוים יועיל שיתוף החסד עם הדין, ועליהם העולם עומד כדכתיב "תלה ארץ על-בלימה", והנה זה בעת קבלת התורה על הר סיני, ששרתה עליו שכינה בשביל שהיה נמוך מכל ההרים, "למה תרצדון הרים גבגבים" וכו', ואף אינה מתקיימת אלא במי שדעתו שפלה עליו כנודע, ואז במעמד הר סיני שקבלו התורה שקטה לגמרי דהיינו לבסוף.

Because of this, the verse says: “From Heaven, You caused judgment to be heard,” that when You created the universe with the attribute of strict justice, the Heavens received [the attribute of strict Justice] upon itself. When the Earth saw that the Heavens had accepted upon themselves this attribute, “the Earth was afraid” that it would be subjected to the same criteria. But afterward, when [G-d] joined the attribute of mercy to [the attribute of strict justice], then “[the Earth] became unconcerned,” being somewhat relieved. But it wasn’t completely unconcerned, for it still had reason to worry, “as G-d rose to execute judgment,” whether righteous or wicked, as above. Thus, while the joining of the attribute of mercy helped somewhat, the Earth was still concerned that G-d would administer strict justice.

Thus, when [the Earth] saw that the reason that G-d was rising was “to deliver all the humble of the Earth, *selah*,” it relaxed completely. For it understand that towards the humble, He was dealing with them with complete kindness. This is as it is said in the first chapter of tractate Rosh Hashanah, “Whose sins does He bear, i.e., forgive? [The sins] of one who forgoes his reckonings [with others for injustices committed against him].”⁷ If so, the partnership of kindness with judgment will be beneficial for the humble, and the world stands with them, as it is written, “Who suspended earth over emptiness.”⁸ This is the answer to question 4.

This was in the time of the acceptance of the Torah at Mt. Sinai, for the Shechina dwelled upon it, as it was the lowest of all of the mountains. “Why gaze with envy, you mountain peaks, at the mountain G-d desired for His dwelling? The L-rd will live there forever!”⁹ [The words of Torah] will stand only for one whose spirit is humble, as is known.¹⁰ Thus, in standing at Mt. Sinai, when [Israel] received the Torah, [the Earth] was completely unconcerned, which is “at the end.”

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⁷ Rosh Hashanah 17a.

⁸ Job 26:7.

⁹ Ps. 68:17.

¹⁰ Yalkut Shimoni on Prophets 480:2: “Words of Torah are found only in one who has a humble spirit.”

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Tractate **Shabbat, chapter 9**, speaks of the acceptance of the Torah at Sinai:

Chizkiya said: What is [the meaning of that] which is written: “From Heaven, You caused judgment to be heard; **the Earth was afraid and unconcerned**; as G-d rose to execute judgment, to deliver all the humble of the Earth. Selah”¹? **If [the Earth] was afraid, why was it unconcerned? And if it was unconcerned, why was it afraid? Rather**, [the meaning is]: **In the beginning, it was afraid, and in the end, it was unconcerned.**” And why was [the Earth] afraid? [It is] in accordance with Reish Lakish, as Reish Lakish said: What is [the meaning of that] which is written: “And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day”²? Why do I require the superfluous [letter] *heh*, [the definite article, which does not appear on any of the other days]? It teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, established a condition with the act of Creation, and said to them: If Israel accepts the Torah [on the sixth day of Sivan], you will exist; and if not, I will return you to [the primordial state of] chaos and disorder.

- Shabbat 88a

הַעוֹלָם מִתְחַבְּטִים לְהַבִּין הַכֶּפֶל שֶׁל לְשׁוֹן זֶה. וְעוֹד יֵשׁ לְהַקְשׁוֹת אִף לְפִי תִירוּץ רַז"ל תִּנְאֵי הַתְּנָה עִם מַעֲשֵׂה בְרֵאשִׁית וְכֹו', אִיךָ יִתְקַשֵּׁר הָעֲנָן שֶׁל הַכְּתוּב שֶׁנִּרְאָה שֶׁהִירְאָה בָּאָה לָהּ כְּשֶׁהִשְׁמִיעַ הַתּוֹרָה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם דְּוָקָא, וְהֵלֵא מִשְׁעָה רֵאשׁוֹנָה שֶׁל הַתְּנָאֵי שְׂיִכָּא יִרְאַה זֶה. וְעוֹד שֶׁהִיָּה לוֹ לֹמַר מִשְׁמַיִם הַשְׁמַעְתָּ דָּת וְיִמְהוּ דִּין. וְעוֹד מֵה שְׁסִיִּים "בְּקוּם-לְמִשְׁפָּט" וְכֹו', וְיִמָּה עֲנָן זֶה לְזֶה. וְעוֹד קָשָׁה הַלְשׁוֹן שֶׁל הַתִּירוּץ, מִתְּחִלָּה יִרְאַה וּלְבַסּוּף שָׁקֵטָה, דְּמַהוּ בַתְּחִלָּה וּבְסוּף, פְּשִׁיטָא שֶׁהִירְאָה קְדָמָה לְשָׁקֵטָה.

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Rather, the answer to questions 1 and 5 is that it’s certainly necessary to say that the Earth was afraid because of two matters. The Earth was afraid first because of one matter, and even after it became unconcerned because of the resolution of the first matter, the fear of the second matter remained. Because of this, [the rabbis] expounded with the repetitive language: “If [the Earth] was afraid, why was it unconcerned? And if it was unconcerned, why was it afraid?” This is what [the rabbis] hinted at when they said, “In the beginning, it was afraid,” and the language “in the beginning” is appropriate because there were two matters causing the fear. Even after [the Earth] became unconcerned from the first matter, it wasn’t completely unconcerned until later, after the second matter was also resolved.

The answer to question 2 is that [the Earth’s] first fear was certainly at the time of the making of the stipulation, i.e., at Creation, that the Earth would only continue to exist if Israel accepted the Torah, as [the rabbis] of blessed memory said.

[The Earth] was also afraid a second time, for it's known that initially, [G-d] created the world to be ruled by the attribute of strict justice. But He saw that it could not exist under those conditions. Thus, He partnered [the attribute of strict justice] with the attribute of mercy. This is the answer to question 3: The verse says "judgment" instead of "law" because the Earth was not only concerned with whether Israel would accept the Law, but it was also concerned about G-d's initial plan to rule via the attribute of strict justice.

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But with all this, [the Earth] still had reason to worry, because with the righteous, the Holy One, Blessed be He, deals with them according to justice. This is as [the rabbis] of blessed memory said: “[In the phrase] ‘declare to My people their transgression’—these [people] are the Torah scholars, whose unwitting [transgressions] become for them tantamount to intentional [transgressions].”³ It is also said, “He is precise with them up to a hairsbreadth [so that even slight deviations can elicit severe punishment].”⁴ It is also said, “Perhaps they would be unable to stand.”⁵ Even with the wicked, He deals with them with kindness, but this kindness has within it absolute strict justice, as it is written, “but those who hate Him, He repays to their faces with destruction.”⁶ Furthermore, even the kindness shown to the wicked doesn't help them, for when they see themselves succeed on a bad path, they do not impose upon their hearts to repent, and they corrupt the world.

³ Bava Metzia 33b.

⁴ Yerushalmi Shekalim 5:1; Yevamot 121b; Bava Kamma 50a.

⁵ See, e.g., Yalkut Shimoni on Prophets 115:1, “It was taught [in a Baraita]: Rabbi Eliezer the Great says that if the Holy One, Blessed be He, came in judgment with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, they would be unable to stand before the rebuke, as it is said, ‘Come, stand before the L-rd while I cite against you all the kindnesses that the L-rd has done to you and your fathers.’”

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משום הכי אמר הפסוק "משמים השמעת דין", דהיינו כשבראת העולם במדת הדין, השמים היו מקבלים עליהם, וכשראתה הארץ שהשמים קבלו עליהם מדה זו, "ארץ יראה", ואחר כך כששיתף עמו מדת הרחמים "ושקטה". אבל לא שקטה לגמרי, שעדיין היה לה לדאוג "בקום למשפט אלהים", בין עם הצדיקים ובין עם הרשעים כנ"ל. וכשראתה "להושיע כל-עגרי-ארץ סלה" דהיינו שלהענוים מתנהג עמהם בחסד גמור, כדאמרינן בפרק קמא דראש השנה למי נושא עון למי שעובר על פשע, אם כן באלו הענוים יועיל שיתוף החסד עם הדין, ועליהם העולם עומד כדכתיב "תלה ארץ על-בלימה", והנה זה בעת קבלת התורה על הר סיני, ששרתה עליו שכינה בשביל שהיה נמוך מכל ההרים, "למה תרצדון הרים גבגבים" וכו', ואף אינה מתקיימת אלא במי שדעתו שפלה עליו כנודע, ואז במעמד הר סיני שקבלו התורה שקטה לגמרי דהיינו לבסוף.

Because of this, the verse says: “From Heaven, You caused judgment to be heard,” that when You created the universe with the attribute of strict justice, the Heavens received [the attribute of strict Justice] upon itself. When the Earth saw that the Heavens had accepted upon themselves this attribute, “the Earth was afraid” that it would be subjected to the same criteria. But afterward, when [G-d] joined the attribute of mercy to [the attribute of strict justice], then “[the Earth] became unconcerned,” being somewhat relieved. But it wasn’t completely unconcerned, for it still had reason to worry, “as G-d rose to execute judgment,” whether righteous or wicked, as above. Thus, while the joining of the attribute of mercy helped somewhat, the Earth was still concerned that G-d would administer strict justice.

Thus, when [the Earth] saw that the reason that G-d was rising was “to deliver all the humble of the Earth, *selah*,” it relaxed completely. For it understand that towards the humble, He was dealing with them with complete kindness. This is as it is said in the first chapter of tractate Rosh Hashanah, “Whose sins does He bear, i.e., forgive? [The sins] of one who forgoes his reckonings [with others for injustices committed against him].”⁷ If so, the partnership of kindness with judgment will be beneficial for the humble, and the world stands with them, as it is written, “Who suspended earth over emptiness.”⁸ This is the answer to question 4.

This was in the time of the acceptance of the Torah at Mt. Sinai, for the Shechina dwelled upon it, as it was the lowest of all of the mountains. “Why gaze with envy, you mountain peaks, at the mountain G-d desired for His dwelling? The L-rd will live there forever!”⁹ [The words of Torah] will stand only for one whose spirit is humble, as is known.¹⁰ Thus, in standing at Mt. Sinai, when [Israel] received the Torah, [the Earth] was completely unconcerned, which is “at the end.”

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⁷ Rosh Hashanah 17a.

⁸ Job 26:7.

⁹ Ps. 68:17.

¹⁰ Yalkut Shimoni on Prophets 480:2: “Words of Torah are found only in one who has a humble spirit.”

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XVII: Yitro (Ex. 18:1–20:23)

Essay 15. Creation and Sinai

שַׁבָּת פָּרָק ט' "אֶרֶץ יִרְאַה וְשָׁקְטָה". אִם יִרְאַה לְמָה שָׁקְטָה? וְאִם שָׁקְטָה לְמָה יִרְאַה? אֲלֵא בַתְּחִלָּה יִרְאַה וְלִבְסוּף שָׁקְטָה וְכֹו' עַב"ל.

Tractate **Shabbat, chapter 9**, speaks of the acceptance of the Torah at Sinai:

Chizkiya said: What is [the meaning of that] which is written: “From Heaven, You caused judgment to be heard; **the Earth was afraid and unconcerned**; as G-d rose to execute judgment, to deliver all the humble of the Earth. Selah”¹? **If [the Earth] was afraid, why was it unconcerned? And if it was unconcerned, why was it afraid? Rather**, [the meaning is]: **In the beginning, it was afraid, and in the end, it was unconcerned.**” And why was [the Earth] afraid? [It is] in accordance with Reish Lakish, as Reish Lakish said: What is [the meaning of that] which is written: “And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day”²? Why do I require the superfluous [letter] *heh*, [the definite article, which does not appear on any of the other days]? It teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, established a condition with the act of Creation, and said to them: If Israel accepts the Torah [on the sixth day of Sivan], you will exist; and if not, I will return you to [the primordial state of] chaos and disorder.

- Shabbat 88a

הַעוֹלָם מִתְחַבְּטִים לְהַבִּין הַכֶּפֶל שֶׁל לְשׁוֹן זֶה. וְעוֹד יֵשׁ לְהַקְשׁוֹת אֵף לְפִי תִירוּץ רַז"ל תִּנְאֵי הַתְּנָה עִם מַעֲשֵׂה בְרֵאשִׁית וְכֹו', אִיךָ יִתְקַשֵּׁר הָעֲנָן שֶׁל הַכְּתוּב שֶׁנִּרְאָה שֶׁהִירְאָה בָּאָה לָהּ כְּשֶׁהִשְׁמִיעַ הַתּוֹרָה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם דְּוָקָא, וְהֵלֵא מִשְׁעָה רֵאשׁוֹנָה שֶׁל הַתְּנָאֵי שְׂיִכָּא יִרְאַה זֶה. וְעוֹד שֶׁהִיָּה לֹו לֹוּמֵר מִשְׁמַיִם הַשְּׁמַעְתָּ דָּת וְיִמְהוּ דִּין. וְעוֹד מֵה שְׁסִיִּים "בְּקוּם-לְמִשְׁפָּט" וְכֹו', וְיִמְה עֲנָן זֶה לְזֶה. וְעוֹד קָשָׁה הַלְשׁוֹן שֶׁל הַתִּירוּץ, מִתְּחִלָּה יִרְאַה וְלִבְסוּף שָׁקְטָה, דְּמַהוּ בַתְּחִלָּה וְבְסוּף, פְּשִׁיטָא שֶׁהִירְאָה קְדָמָה לְשָׁקְטָה.

Question 1: **Everyone has wrestled to understand the repetitive language** of the Gemara, “If [the Earth] was afraid, why was it unconcerned? And if it was unconcerned, why was it afraid?”

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¹ Ps. 76:9–10. The Torah is discussing the destruction of the army of the Assyrian king Sennacherib, but the Talmud is interpreting the verses as pertaining to the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

² Gen. 1:31.

Question 2: **Also, we can question the explanation of the rabbis of blessed memory that this was a condition “that G-d established with the act of Creation: If Israel accepts the Torah, you [i.e., the Earth] will exist; and if not, I will return you to [the primordial state of] chaos and disorder.” How is this explanation of the rabbis, related to Israel’s acceptance of Torah, connected to the matter of Scripture, “From Heaven, you caused judgment to be heard”? It appears from the Scriptural text that the fear came to [the Earth] specifically when the Torah was heard from the Heavens, for wasn’t the fear relevant from the first hour of the stipulation, i.e., at the time of Creation?**

Question 3: **Also, according to the rabbis, who said the verse is discussing the acceptance of Torah, then it should have said, “From Heaven, You caused ‘law’ to be heard.” What is the meaning of this “judgment” that it instead says?**

Question 4: **Also, verse 10 makes sense if we understand verse 9 to be discussing judgment, but if verse 9 is instead discussing Torah, then what is this conclusion, “as G-d rose to execute judgment, to deliver all the humble of the Earth”? What is the connection between this verse discussing judgment and that previous verse discussing the Torah?**

Question 5: **Another difficulty is the language of the solution, “In the beginning, it was afraid, and in the end, it was unconcerned,” for what is this “in the beginning” and “in the end,” for it’s obvious that fear preceded being unconcerned.**

אלא ודאי צריך לומר שבשביל שתי דברים הארץ יראת מתחלה, ואף לאחר ששקטה מאחת נשארה עדיין היראה השנית, ומשום הכי דרשו הפל אמ יראה למה שקטה, ואם שקטה וכו'. וזהו שרמזו ו"ל פשאמרו בתחלה יראה, ושייך לשון בתחלה מפני שהם שתי דברים. ואף לאחר ששקטה מאחת לא שקטה לגמרי עד לבסוף, והיינו דבנדאי היראה הראשונה היתה בעת שהתנה התנאי וכו' כמו שאמרו ו"ל, ועוד יראה פעם שנית, שנודע שמתחלה ברא העולם במדת הדיון, יראה שאינו מתקיים, שיתף עמו מדת הרחמים.

Rather, the answer to questions 1 and 5 is that it’s certainly necessary to say that the Earth was afraid because of two matters. The Earth was afraid first because of one matter, and even after it became unconcerned because of the resolution of the first matter, the fear of the second matter remained. Because of this, [the rabbis] expounded with the repetitive language: “If [the Earth] was afraid, why was it unconcerned? And if it was unconcerned, why was it afraid?” This is what [the rabbis] hinted at when they said, “In the beginning, it was afraid,” and the language “in the beginning” is appropriate because there were two matters causing the fear. Even after [the Earth] became unconcerned from the first matter, it wasn’t completely unconcerned until later, after the second matter was also resolved.

The answer to question 2 is that [the Earth’s] first fear was certainly at the time of the making of the stipulation, i.e., at Creation, that the Earth would only continue to exist if Israel accepted the Torah, as [the rabbis] of blessed memory said.

[The Earth] was also afraid a second time, for it's known that initially, [G-d] created the world to be ruled by the attribute of strict justice. But He saw that it could not exist under those conditions. Thus, He partnered [the attribute of strict justice] with the attribute of mercy. This is the answer to question 3: The verse says "judgment" instead of "law" because the Earth was not only concerned with whether Israel would accept the Law, but it was also concerned about G-d's initial plan to rule via the attribute of strict justice.

וימה שלא הנה מתקיים, היינו הארץ שלא היתה יכולה לעמוד, אבל השמים שאין בהם חטא היו מתקיימים אף בדין, ולכן לקיים הארץ הוצרך לשמח החסד עם הדין. אבל עם כל זה יש לה עדיין מקום לדאוג, שהרי עם הצדיקים הקב"ה מתנהג עמם בדין, כמו שאמרו ז"ל אלו תלמידי חכמים, ששגגות נעשות להם פגודות, ועוד מדקדק עם חסידיו פחות השערה, ושמה אינם יכולים לעמוד. ועם הרשעים מתנהג עמם בחסד, אבל זה החסד הוא דין גמור כדכתיב "ומשלם לשונאיו אל-פניו להאבידו", ועוד שבראות עצמם מצליחים בדרך הרעה אינם משימים את לבם לעשות תשובה ומשחיתים העולם.

Under the attribute of strict justice, what would not exist would be the Earth, which could not stand, but the Heavens—within which there is no sin—was standing even with such strict justice. Therefore, the existence of the Earth required a partnership of kindness with strict justice.

But with all this, [the Earth] still had reason to worry, because with the righteous, the Holy One, Blessed be He, deals with them according to justice. This is as [the rabbis] of blessed memory said: “[In the phrase] ‘declare to My people their transgression’—these [people] are the Torah scholars, whose unwitting [transgressions] become for them tantamount to intentional [transgressions].”³ It is also said, “He is precise with them up to a hairsbreadth [so that even slight deviations can elicit severe punishment].”⁴ It is also said, “Perhaps they would be unable to stand.”⁵ Even with the wicked, He deals with them with kindness, but this kindness has within it absolute strict justice, as it is written, “but those who hate Him, He repays to their faces with destruction.”⁶ Furthermore, even the kindness shown to the wicked doesn't help them, for when they see themselves succeed on a bad path, they do not impose upon their hearts to repent, and they corrupt the world.

³ Bava Metzia 33b.

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⁵ See, e.g., Yalkut Shimoni on Prophets 115:1, “It was taught [in a Baraita]: Rabbi Eliezer the Great says that if the Holy One, Blessed be He, came in judgment with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, they would be unable to stand before the rebuke, as it is said, ‘Come, stand before the L-rd while I cite against you all the kindnesses that the L-rd has done to you and your fathers.’”

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* * *

⁷ Rosh Hashanah 17a.

⁸ Job 26:7.

⁹ Ps. 68:17.

¹⁰ Yalkut Shimoni on Prophets 480:2: “Words of Torah are found only in one who has a humble spirit.”